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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION: CROSS-STRAIT RELATIONS

¶1. Summary: Taiwan's major Chinese-language dailies focused December 20-22 news coverage on the confirmation of the H5N2 avian flu epidemic situation in southern Taiwan; on the fourth KMT-CCP forum held in Shanghai; and on the local economic downturn.

¶2. Following the recently-concluded forum between Taiwan's KMT and the Communist Party of China (CCP), an editorial in the pro-independence "Liberty Times" alleged that by giving benefits to Taiwan when Taiwan is facing an economic downturn, China is turning Taiwan into another Hong Kong or Macau in the long-run. An editorial in the centrist, KMT-leaning "China Times" said the meaning of the fourth KMT-CCP forum was significantly different from previous ones because it was actually a talk between the two ruling parties. The editorial, however, warned that more complicated and thornier cross-Straits issues lie ahead. One op-ed said Taiwan must not let China internalize the Taiwan issue, which would be advantageous to China in using force against Taiwan. An editorial in the pro-independence, English-language "Taiwan News" wrote some scenarios that China might use to deal with Taiwan's bid to the World Health Assembly (WHA) in May 2009. End summary.

A) "China Uses the KMT-CCP Forum to Give Orders to the Ma Ying-jeou Administration"

The pro-independence "Liberty Times" [circulation: 720,000] editorialized (12/22):

"... First of all, in the KMT-CCP forum, China posed as a motherland rescuing a suffering Taiwan and 'Hong Kong-ifying or Macau-ifying' Taiwan to make it China's political and economy colony. ...

"Second, the Ma Ying-jeou Administration violated the law and sent five officials to attend the KMT-CCP forum. Such an action formally and thoroughly discredited Ma Ying-jeou's statement that the so-called KMT-CCP forum was a second track [of dialogue] between the two sides of the Taiwan Strait. The KMT-CCP forum that [Chinese President] Hu Jintao touted was in fact the first track [of dialogue] with regard to cross-Straits policy. ...

B) "The Really Complicated Cross-Straits Issues Have Not Been Put on the Table Yet"

The centrist, KMT-leaning "China Times" [circulation: 220,000] editorialized (12/22):

"Although [the KMT-CCP forum] was only a party to party dialogue platform in terms of its nature, the meaning [of this KMT-CCP forum] certainly was different from previous ones because both sides [the KMT and the CCP] were the ruling parties and this was the first time that there were [Taiwan] officials sitting at the table and conducting dialogue directly. Moreover, the issues being discussed were important ones which matter in the next stage of interaction between the two sides of the Taiwan Strait. At the very least, one can be sure that although the consensus reached between both sides [of the Taiwan Strait] were only called 'recommendations,' the nine recommendations would very likely become important points in the

next stage of substantive interaction between the two sides of the Taiwan Strait. ...

"With the launching of the direct three links [air, sea, and postal service between Taiwan and China], everyone knew that both sides of the Taiwan Strait have started a process that can not be reversed. After the successful conclusion of the KMT-CCP forum and before the third talks between [Taiwan's Straits Exchange Foundation (SEF) Chairman] P. K. Chiang and [China's Association for Relations across the Taiwan Strait (ARATS) Chairman] Chen Yunlin next year, the table will be served with more issues and more complicated issues. After issues such as economy and trade, tourism, shipping, and education are resolved, more sensitive issues will appear on the stage. It is still unclear how [Taiwan's] participation in the World Health Assembly (WHA) is going to be resolved. On the eve of the opening of the KMT-CCP forum, President Ma Ying-jeou wrote a letter to the Thailand media urging Beijing to remove missiles [targeted at Taiwan], whose purpose intention was very clear. There are many complicated cross-Strait issues that have not yet been served on the table."

C) "Beijing's Bid to 'Internalize' Taiwan"

J. Michael Cole, a write based in Taipei, opined in the pro-independence, English-language "Taipei Times" [circulation: 30,000] (12/22):

"One of the key components of Beijing's policy on Taiwan and Tibet has been to internalize the problems and to fight efforts by so-called 'separatists' to internationalize them. ...

"Speaking at a forum on cross-strait developments organized by the Brookings Institution and National Chengchi University's Institute

of International Relations on Dec. 4, University of Hong Kong professor Richard Weixing Hu, representing the view from China, said Beijing's focus should increasingly be on de-internationalizing the Taiwan question and institutionalizing, or internalizing, it.

"The rationale behind this approach makes perfect sense, as the more internal the Taiwan question becomes for China, the easier it will be for Beijing to placate efforts, in Taiwan and abroad, to sustain Taiwan as a sovereign entity or argue for its defense. A successful bid to sell the story of Taiwan as a domestic matter would also make it easier for Beijing to use force, just as Moscow has managed to evade international opprobrium by portraying Chechnya as a domestic problem. ...

"If Taiwan is to survive as an independent sovereign entity, every effort must be made to ensure that it remains an international problem, even if, for the first time in decades, such efforts must be made without government help. In other words, we may be presented with a case of sub-state actors being called upon to save the state from itself. ...

"If the Ma administration won't do it, the people can. Taiwan must remain an international issue."

D) "Taiwan Must Beware of China's WHA Trap"

The pro-independence, English-language "Taiwan News" [circulation: 20,000] editorialized (12/22):

"... [China's Taiwan Affairs Office Spokesman] Lee's trial balloon hints that a formula may be close to completion, but our greatest concern is under what conditions and through what channels will Beijing allow Taiwan to participate in the WHA.

"While the vast majority of the Taiwan people want at least a formal and distinct observer status in the WHA and 'meaningful participation' in the WHO, PRC sources indicate that Beijing 'will remain firm on sovereignty' and will insist that any concessions on Taiwan's participation in the WHA or WHO an 'exception' that will not be applicable to any other international organization in the United Nations system.

"To realize even this limited concession, Beijing would have to invalidate the secret memorandum it signed with the WHO

secretary-general in May 2005 that granted the PRC Ministry of Health the authority to vet all WHO health-related communications and information to Taiwan and to permit Taiwan specialists from some participation in WHO events under the rubric of 'Taipei, China.'

"The chances that Beijing will agree to revoke this arrangement are low. A more likely scenario from Beijing's standpoint would be to allow Taiwan to receive first-hand and timely information from the WHO, perhaps as a 'health entity' under the rubric of 'Taipei, China' or at best 'Chinese Taipei.'

"Such an arrangement, which would not transgress the bounds of the May 2005 MOU, would exclude Taiwan from formal and distinct participation in the WHO system and allow Beijing to retain an ultimate veto power on Taiwan's participation, but fall far short of what most Taiwan people see as 'international participation.'

"It is also possible that the PRC could simply verbally discourage its diplomatic allies from vetoing Taiwan's application for WHA observer status as a hypocritical sign of 'goodwill,' regardless of the outcome of the actual vote.

"Naturally, the worst case scenario would be for the PRC to continue to reject Taiwan's bid for WHA observer status outright in expectations that Ma and the KMT will not dare to reconsider their 'tilt' toward Beijing regardless of such a slap in the face. ..."

YOUNG